

The Day, Congress looks to help tighten homes from leaking dollars

By Anthony Cronin

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New London - Barry Truskowski is a Sherlock Holmes when it comes to drafts, leaky windows or missing insulation.

He can, with his trusty energy-saving devices, detect where cold air is coming into homes, resulting in heating dollars figuratively flying out the window, or up the flue in some cases.

The energy analyst with the Willimantic-based Access social-services agency is a skilled detective when it comes to scanning homes for energy efficiency - or usually a lack thereof.

So bright and early Wednesday morning, Truskowski was checking out the 1917-built home of Peter Hart at 545 Montauk Ave. in New London to determine how the two-story home could be made more energy efficient - and more wallet-friendly for the homeowner.

"We've got air leaking into this house," said the energy auditor, "and we're going to find it."

"Now I put on my Sherlock Holmes cap," Truskowski said as he began searching closed windows, doors and even the trap door to the attic for leaks, while a special fan inserted into the front door pulled air out of the house during the brief test.

Hart, who has been in the house for about two years, says his electric heating bill last winter was a big burden. He estimates he spent more than \$3,000 during last year's heating season trying to keep the house reasonably warm.

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, who represents the Second Congressional District, was also on hand Wednesday morning, watching as Truskowski searched for insulation, broken windows or cracks and checked the windows and interior walls for leaks.

As part of his move to raise awareness of how beneficial energy-efficiency programs can be for homeowners such as Hart, Courtney toured three homes in New London, Danielson and Tolland on Wednesday to see firsthand how energy audits are performed.

"This has been a battle every year," Courtney said of congressional attempts to increase federal funding for energy-efficiency programs, such as the one benefitting Hart's Montauk Avenue home.

Courtney said the New England congressional caucus will push for at least \$1 billion in funding for energy-efficiency programs in the coming fiscal year.

The congressman has also introduced legislation called the Families and Small Business Energy Tax Relief Act of 2008 that would provide temporary tax credits to small businesses and families to help pay energy costs.

The federal Department of Energy funds the weatherization-assistance program. Over the past three decades, it has provided such services to more than 5.6 million lower-income families. On average weatherization services help to reduce heating bills by about 32 percent and overall energy bills by about \$358 a year.

Last year, the nonprofit Access agency - which is partially funded by the federal weatherization program - provided energy-saving services to more than 600 people in Windham, Tolland and New London counties. This year, there's a waiting list of some 350 homeowners.

The agency's services include energy audits such as those offered by Truskowski, installation of new attic and wall insulation, new windows, heating system repairs and caulking and weather stripping of various doors and windows.

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